

Savannah Morning News

Lindsay's legacy

Nonprofits honor the retired attorney and volunteer for his dedication to social justice.

By Mary Carr Mayle

SAFE Shelter executive director Gail Reese-Wheeler vividly recalls her first encounter with Jim Lindsay's indomitable spirit.

It was nine years ago and Reese-Wheeler was barely into her second week with the shelter when Lindsay, a SAFE Shelter board member, invited her to lunch to talk about "some ideas he had for the shelter."

"Jim had so much vision and enthusiasm," Reese-Wheeler says. "By the end of that one-hour lunch, he had listed off at least 20 projects - not the least of which was a new shelter -- and was sitting there waiting for me to respond."

"He scared me to death, until I began to realize that Jim Lindsay was the kind of man who would roll up his shirtsleeves and work right beside you."

On Thursday, Lindsay got his first look at one of his most fervent hopes come true -- a new home for SAFE Shelter. As his son, Ken, wheels him up the concrete ramp and through the doors, Lindsey's grin says it all.

"I'm amazed. I had hoped this would happen, but I never dreamed it would be so soon or so grand," he says with difficulty, picking his words carefully.

Lindsay, who has suffered several strokes and moved with his wife, Shirley, to an assisted-care community in Jacksonville, Fla. was back in town for "Jim Lindsay Day," which included a tour of the shelter and a reception attended by many of the people whose lives he touched as a volunteer with Savannah nonprofits.

Lou Barnes first met Lindsay when he served on the board of [Parent and Child Development Services](#), where she was the human resources manager. Later, they both served on the SAFE Shelter board.

"I wouldn't have missed this day for anything," Barnes says. "Jim is such a giving person, so committed to helping those less fortunate. I've seen very few men as dedicated to community volunteerism as Jim. Yes, he was retired and had the time, but he could have just as easily spent that time on the golf course. Jim is one who has always given as generously of his time as he did his money."

A retired corporate lawyer, Lindsay entered Oberlin College at 14, then went on to law school at the University of Michigan. Daughter Pippi Ellison, who flew down from Boston for the celebration, says her father's passion for social justice "has always been there."

"From very early on, I learned that there were people in circumstances very different from ours and that ignoring those people was not an option," Ellison says. "My father was always working for fair- and low-income housing.

When the family lived in New York, Ellison says, her father got the whole family involved in the New York City Mission Society, passing on the exclusive summer camps to send his children to the society's camp for inner-city kids.

"I was a camper and my older sister and brother were counselors. It was education through immersion," says Ellison, who works as a clinical psychologist near Boston.

Meeting Jim Lindsay was an education of a different sort for Bill Broker of Georgia Legal Services.

"This was back when we were on the second floor of the Urban Health Center on York Street and I had been managing attorney for only a year or two," Broker recalls. "In strolls Jim Lindsay, saying he's a retired lawyer now living in Savannah and he was interested in doing free legal work for poor people.

"He really shook up my whole mindset," Broker says. "I was so focused on bringing in new young lawyers right out of school because that was what we could afford. It never occurred to me that there might be older, experienced attorneys out there willing to help."

It was Lindsay, Broker says, who first broached the idea of having a senior volunteer attorney program, which is flourishing today.

Lindsay helped out at Georgia Legal Services by working on benefits cases, such as Social Security and Medicaid claims. He and Broker later began the Mediation Center in Savannah, with both serving on the nonprofit's first board.

But, perhaps Lindsay's biggest contribution to Georgia Legal Services was the inspiration he provided its young lawyers.

"Jim sat in on our weekly meetings, listening to people talk about their cases," Broker says. "He had such a depth of understanding, a maturity of judgment and an uncanny ability to hone in on the real issues.

"Just to hear him say, 'I believe in what you're doing,' raised our game and made us want to work harder.

"I think that's the kind of effect Jim Lindsay has on everyone he touches."